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SUBJECT: PRINCE OF THE MARSHES GIVES TOUR DE HORIZON

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CLASSIFIED BY: Louis L. Bono, Director, Basrah Regional Embassy
Office, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

[¶1.](#) (S) SUMMARY: The famed Abu Hatem, (aka "Prince of the Marshes") visited the Regional Embassy Office on November 16. Having closely dealt with USG agencies in Iraq for several years, he observed the need to improve interagency coordination and expand our contacts in the rural areas. He opined that Iran wants to kick the Coalition out of Iraq by using the Jaysh al-Mahdi as a proxy and then export the Iranian revolution via the Badr Organization and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. He suggested that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki was too close to Iran for Iraq's own good. He provided his vision for a tribal force, which he said must have ties to the central government. He added that militias control Maysan, criticized reconstruction efforts as being ineffective, and praised Basrah's Chief of Police. End Summary.

U.S. AGENCIES NEED BETTER COORDINATION IN IRAQ

[¶2.](#) (S) Abu Hatem (real name Karem Mahud al-Muhammadi) began by pointing out his close working relationship with the entire gambit of the USG - including diplomats, the military, and Congress - over the last four years. As a result, he has concluded "each agency in Iraq is doing its own thing without coordinating with the others" and unfortunately, soldiers paid the price when information was not shared. Solid intelligence was critical to the success of not only our military operations but also necessary to keep U.S. policy-makers informed. In this respect, he recommended that U.S. expand its contact base beyond the cities and into the rural areas.

IRAN

[¶3.](#) (S) He said that Iran's short-term objective is to kick the Coalition out of Iraq and over the long-term, export its Shi'a revolution throughout the Middle East. Iran has co-opted the Jaysh al-Mahdi to achieve its short-term goal and uses the Badr Organization and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq for the long-term prize. He opined that Iran and Al-Qaeda arrogantly believe they can defeat the Coalition in Iraq as they did with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

[¶4.](#) (S) Abu Hatem fell just short of calling PM Maliki an Iranian. He said that Maliki asked him to form a tribal confederation throughout southern Iraq, but he refused, telling

Maliki he should first form a legal committee to save Iraq from government corruption. He added, "How can I be in a bloc the PM wants when he would have it infiltrated by Iran on the first day?" Abu Hatem opposes the inclusion of Dawa, 15 Shabaan, Sayyid al Shuhada, and ISCI in such a bloc. When it came to Iran, Maliki works both above and below the table, he claimed.

TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT

15. (S) Abu Hatem next related his vision for a tribal force in southern Iraq to thwart Iranian weapons smuggling, help stabilize the security environment and provide employment. Initially, an intelligence cell should be formed to vet recruits and identify smuggling routes. The force would be comprised of three battalions totaling 1500 men from various tribes. He cautioned that they needed to be properly budgeted for and fall under the authority of the Ministry of Defense or Interior (and eventually integrated into the ISF).

THE SITUATION IN MAYSAN

16. (C) He described security in Maysan as weak. The militias, he said, were in control because the Iraqi Security Forces fear confrontation. He told us the tribes asked the Provincial Council to disband the militias, but the officials either fear or have ties to the militias. Maysan's politicians often tell him "a coward policeman is better than a dead one." Abu Hatem rolled his eyes when it came to the Governor Maliki, saying he had JAM cells at his disposal and used them for assassinations.

RECONSTRUCTION

17. (C) Abu Hatem said that billions of dollars have been spent on reconstruction, yet Maysan has not seen any improvements because of Provincial Council corruption and graft. Water filtration systems and playgrounds in the villages would be more beneficial in Maysan than multi-million dollar projects. He also said Maysan needs a mobile medical clinic to service the rural villages. By demonstrating tangible improvements to

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Iraqis, a reconstruction program could also combat Iranian influence. He cautioned however, that security was more important and essential to economic growth.

"SUPPORT MG JALIL"

18. (C) He praised Basrah Chief of Police, Major General Jalil Khalaf Shueil, noting the irony as the two had fought against each other in the past. What matters to Abu Hatem is that Jalil is a nationalist trying to stand up to the militias. He opined that Jalil's inner circle was infiltrated by Iranian-backed militias that need to be purged. He told Jalil to vet his officers and diplomatically transfer the bad ones away so as not to make any more enemies. Jalil may have survived multiple assassination attempts, but his death would be a loss for Basrah.
BONO